



*The  
Little  
Story  
of My  
Long  
Life*

*The Life of  
Archbishop Lefebvre  
as told by himself.*



*The  
Little Story  
of My  
Long Life*

These conferences were given by  
His Excellency Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre  
to the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X  
on February 7, 8, and 12, 1990.

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- To keep the distinctive, personal character of the conferences, their spoken style has been maintained. Slight alterations have been made to the text for the sake of clarity.
- The chapter titles and subtitles are the editor's.
- The footnotes are likewise the editor's, or when indicated, the translator's.
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## **Preface of His Excellency Bishop Bernard Fellay**

*Dear Reader,*

*During a visit of their founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, to the Abbaye Saint Michel [the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X in France] where he often liked to retire for a few days, the Sisters seized the opportunity to ask him for a few conferences.*

*Like a good father sensing the secret desires of his children, the Archbishop gave them, in a few talks, a little summary of his life.*

*One will admire therein his simplicity of heart, the humility which he knew how to preserve notwithstanding his high offices, and the meekness which always radiated from him amid the adversities of so many years of combat for the Church.*

*May the following confidences—whose spoken style has been kept in an attempt to retain all their savor—help you understand better the magnificent soul of this herald of the Faith and defender of the Catholic priesthood.*

*Sydney, October 17, 1995  
Feast of Saint Margaret Mary*

*+ Bernard Fellay*



1990—*The Archbishop liked to come to the Abbaye Saint Michel, the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X.*

*It was during one of these visits that he gave them the few conferences which follow.*

## Prologue

I was asked if I would give some conferences to the Sisters. Oh, since they asked, I will willingly tell them *the little story of my long life*. In all simplicity, I will speak a little about what God has done for me during my life.

I tried to find a title for these few conferences, and this is what I thought:

**"The workings of Providence  
throughout my life, and how good it is  
to abandon oneself completely  
to that Providence  
in order to please God."**

*Ut placeat tibi Domine Deus.*

This is the prayer which we read at the Offertory: "*We offer Thee this sacrifice,*" our sacrifice in union with Thine so that it may be pleasing to Thee.

*Ut placeat tibi Domine Deus.*

I own that my eighty or eighty-two years of conscious life—since I will not speak too much of my years of infancy—have indeed taught me to follow Providence, to seek God's Will in the circumstances and events of life, in order to try to follow it.



## Chapter 1

# *Childhood*

**W**e had *a few years of peaceful family life with good Catholic, profoundly Catholic parents.* The parish church was not far away, five minutes on foot. Early every morning, my parents went there to receive Holy Communion, and to attend Mass when they could.

At that time, in the parish, a priest distributed Holy Communion every quarter of an hour, from five-fifteen until nine o'clock in the morning, I think. This was the custom in those days, because many persons went to work and did not have time to stay for Mass. Therefore, by arriving at the church a few minutes before the quarter of the hour, one was sure of being able to receive Communion. A few minutes of preparation for Communion, a few minutes of thanksgiving afterwards, and then one left for work. My parents usually attended Mass, but if not, they at least went to receive Communion.

Keeping the laws of God, they began by having five children, one after another, then three later on. The first three in 1903, 1904, 1905;<sup>1</sup> then in 1907 Sister Mary Gabriel,<sup>2</sup> in 1908 Sister Mary Christiane,<sup>3</sup> and in 1914, just on the eve of the war, Joseph; then the two others after the war.

We lived happily during those years preceding the war. My parents married in 1902; I was born in 1905. So I was nine years old when the war broke out.

### *Life in the North*

The ambiance of life in the North was one of work. Work in the factories dominated everything. Everyone went, employer and employees alike; some at six o'clock in the morning, others at seven-thirty. The workers remained until the sound of the bell and the employer sometimes until nine or ten o'clock in the evening. And that is how it was every day, day after day.

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<sup>1</sup> René in 1903, Jeanne in 1904, and Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Bernadette was her baptismal name. She was the co-foundress of the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

<sup>3</sup> Christiane was her baptismal name. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

*Marcel at  
age five.*



*The Lefebvre family (1913).*

Between five-thirty and six o'clock in the morning you could hear the loom machines in the textile factories starting up. The chimneys began to smoke, since everything was operated with coal; there was no electricity yet. This was daily life, somewhat monotonous. In that area, the sky was usually overcast, somewhat gray, and so we were not exactly eager to go on walks. The people thus loved to work and would have been unhappy if they could not go to work. I think it is somewhat the same in the German-speaking part of Switzerland; it is the same thing—you<sup>1</sup> will certainly agree with me. When I went to visit Ibach in the region of Schwytz, there was a lady there, Mrs. Elsener, a good person, who had a cutlery factory. She employed one thousand workers—no less! It was not a small business. Her husband having passed away, she was the owner, running the factory with her son. All her children worked: the girls in the office and the boys in the factory. She worked from morning until evening too, and in her simplicity, she said to me: *"You know, our employees are unhappy on Sunday because they cannot come and work in the factory... This is their life."*

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<sup>1</sup> Swiss German Sisters were present at the conferences. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

That is how it used to be in the North, a period which is long past. Nowadays, practically speaking, the textile industry has collapsed; it no longer exists because of foreign competitors, because of new conditions.

There used to be a mining field connected with the one in Belgium, in the direction of Mons, which extended as far as the Ruhr in Germany. It was an immense mining field, running all across Europe and all the way up to England. It was from there that coal was taken to heat the factories, etc. Factories were thus established near the mines and not far from the ports in order to receive cotton and wool from Australia, Argentina, and Egypt. Since it was a populated, industrious area of hard working people, the factories prospered at that time under favorable conditions.

Afterwards, with electricity and petroleum, the conditions of life, means of transportation, you name it—everything changed. This brought about foreign competition: Japan, the United States, and South America all established their own industries which resulted, practically speaking, in bankruptcy everywhere. Today there are hardly any textile factories in the North.

We thus lived peacefully. We had a good academy about five minutes away from us; a good girls' school run by the Ursulines was also very close. The girls went to the Ursulines, the boys to the academy, and that was everyday life.

We left at eight o'clock. By the grace of God, we had two good persons who helped Mother take care of the children. Before we left, they would say to us: *"Have you forgotten anything? Do you have your handkerchief in your pocket? Did you remember to take your snack? Have you forgotten this, or that?..."* Then, giving us a big kiss, they would add: *"It's time to go. Goodbye. Be careful, and be sure to walk on the sidewalk..."* We could say that we had the affection of three mothers. We were happy children at that time.

## *First World War*

Then came the terrible war. Wars like the one of 1914-1918 are awful, dreadful!

There was mobilization of course: from one day to the next, all the men were gone and the mothers remained alone with their children. To think back on these things; they were frightening, horrible. What would the mothers do for work? What would they live on? What would become of them when there were no longer men at home?

It was the same thing in the schools: most of the teachers had been drafted and were gone. A few remained, either because they were old, or because they were ailing or sick. In the parishes, the curates were also drafted: only one or two priests remained where previously there had been five or six.

And then, very quickly, came the fighting: invasions, deaths, prisoners, etc. News was sent from the front: so many dead, a lot of prisoners. Many of the people of the North were made prisoners in Belgium.

As for my father, he did not leave right away. Having six children, he was not drafted, so he remained. Still, he wanted to help the French and English prisoners to escape from behind the enemy lines, prisons, and camps to which they were confined, so they could return to their families. In January 1915, sensing that he was wanted by the Germans and that he would certainly be shot if he were caught, he had to flee. He left, passing through Belgium, Holland, and England, and from there returned to France in order to evade being shot by the German police.

Father was gone, so we remained there during the war, during the four years of occupation. The Germans came to occupy the city two months later. We saw hussars and lancers (all on horseback at that time) processing through the streets, wearing helmets and

carrying lances nine feet long. They occupied the city, mobilized this time for the Germans, since the army had to be housed and taken care of. Even the young women, and those who were a little older, all who were able, were mobilized and had to work for the German army.

At noon, the city distributed soup; not having much of anything to eat, we would go to get some soup in one of the rooms of the city hall. The Americans had supposedly sent us food: chickens had arrived completely rotten from over there, and flour. It was probably, I don't know, buckwheat flour, or a potato or vegetable flour. We wondered where this flour had been, because the bread which the baker made from it was black, completely black, and it would not dry out. The inside was still mushy and had even come apart from the crust; it was like mastic, and that is what we had to eat. It was a kind of bread... We bought this from the baker. We had to eat something and what other choice did we have!

It was truly a time of hardship and poverty, of dire poverty; then there were also the searches. The Germans found the stocks of wool which we had placed inside the walls of our factory basement so that they would not be taken. The Germans systematically made holes every three or four yards in all the walls of the factories, in all the basements, to make sure that no wool, etc. was hidden. Since some was found in our factory, my mother





*Marcel,  
a Eucharistic  
Crusader (1919).*



*During Mrs. Lefebvre's illness (1919).*

was put in prison for several weeks. I do not remember anymore if it was several months or several weeks, but anyway, she was put in prison because of it.

Mother thus left her children alone in the hands of servants who were very kind; the whole situation, however, caused her much distress. Her spine began to decalcify to such an extent, that at the end of the war, she had to be put in a cast. I can still see her. For years she was stretched out in the dining room of the house, as a consequence of the sufferings and hardships of the war.

That war was truly the cause of painful sufferings. We, who were children, did not fully realize their extent, or not as much as the older ones, of course. But, being very close to the front in southern Belgium, near Ypres and the well-known Mount Kemmel where terrible battles were fought, certain things could not go unnoticed. At night, we could see the horizon completely lit up by the shells which were exploding continuously in great quantities. We would hear the rumbling and noise of the shells. The sky was lit up all along the front line. It was horrible. Then, the following day, we would see the wounded arriving at the hospital across from our house: wounded people in groups by the hundreds—not counting the dead—from the Allies, from the French side, as well as from the German side. Since we were on the side occupied by the Germans, we mostly saw their wounded. All those poor, wounded people...

So, you see, **all this left its mark on our childhood.** Even if we were only nine, ten, and eleven years old, those scenes remain engraved in our memories... War is something truly terrible, and all the consequences of this war, all the suffering, the continual emotional toll...

One day, the Germans announced the mobilization of all able-bodied persons for work in centers (sorting bullets, pieces of copper and so on) because they were beginning to run out of copper for the shells, etc. Personnel were needed. Orders were thus given for all the members of each household to line up on the sidewalk and be prepared to leave. Everyone sixteen or seventeen years old and older (can you imagine—already at seventeen!), every able-bodied person had to be ready with a suitcase on the sidewalk, and the Germans came by and chose whom they wanted. We did not know beforehand who would or would not leave. So everyone had to go out; I remember this very well. We were children, so they did not take us, and the persons who worked for us in the house were too old to be taken; but we watched that parade of persons on the sidewalk. The Germans came with trucks, made the conscripted persons climb on, and took them away without their knowing what was to become of them.

Of course all this caused worry, sorrow, and separations; it was frightening. You cannot imagine what it was like, what war can be. The cruelty, brutality, injuries, separations, moral sufferings; all this was hard, really hard. It left its mark on us, the older ones. Joseph, only a year old, did not realize what was going on; but the five of us were marked by these happenings, and I think that our vocations were due, at least in part, to them. We saw that human life meant little, and that you had to know how to suffer. It should also be mentioned that there was great piety during those times. There was the rosary every evening and the church was full, of women especially, but also of a good number of elderly men—the young people no longer being there. Every evening the rosary was recited, the last decade said with our arms in the form of a cross, followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The whole parish filled the enormous church. We prayed and prayed for all who had left, for prisoners, for those who were at the front. There was obviously very great fervor at that time. All these things, you see, created a particular atmosphere.

My brother René, the eldest, was fifteen years old in 1918. We feared that the Germans would end up taking, regardless of their age, all who were capable of doing any kind of work. It was possible to evade this thanks to the Red Cross trains which went across

Switzerland. They took away children, up to age fifteen, who had relatives to receive them in the unoccupied zone of France. Only northern and eastern France were occupied.

Since my father had left and was in Versailles, my brother René crossed Switzerland and met him there, where he continued his studies.

### *Vocation*

So through the war, I would say, Providence guided my own life and that of my brother. If there had not been a war, it is evident that René would have never gone to study in Versailles. If he had had a missionary vocation, he would have directly entered the Holy Ghost Fathers or the White Fathers. Being in Versailles however, he asked my father if he could go to the seminary of Grandchamp to do his philosophical studies and finish his other studies. He was accepted there, even though he did not immediately tell them he thought he had a vocation to the priesthood. He did not go to the major seminary with that in mind, but at the time the doors were quite open, especially to those who came from occupied areas.



*René*



*Marcel*



*The seminarians' vacation (1926).*

René therefore finished his studies at the seminary of Grandchamp in Versailles, and his philosophy teacher was no less than Father Colin. Father Colin, the author of a book of philosophy, was very Roman, very attached to Rome and to the French Seminary where he had done all his studies. When my father told him that perhaps René had a vocation, it was decided, with René's consent, that since the region of Lille was still closed, he would do his studies at the French Seminary in Rome. He left in 1919.

See how Providence was directing everything? Once the war was over, we were able to reunite as a family. In 1919, we were all together again at the family home with my father. My brother René, already in the seminary, had come back for vacation.

Finally, in 1923, I, in turn, told my parents that I would very much like to become a priest. Since my idea was to be a priest in the diocese—priest, curate, pastor—in a village, I was thinking of going to the diocesan seminary of Lille; I could not at all imagine myself leaving for Rome. I was not very intellectually minded and the studies there were done in Latin... To go there, take courses at the Gregorian University, pass difficult examinations... No, as far as I was concerned, I wanted to stay in the diocese; since I wanted to work in the

diocese, there was no point in me going to Rome. But my father said to me: *"No, no; you must join your brother! Since your brother is in Rome, you are going to Rome too. And besides, the diocese..."* He was somewhat wary of the progressive spirit of the seminary and of the reputation of him who was to become Cardinal Liénart.<sup>1</sup>

My father was not at all progressive, and so it was, *"No, no, Rome will be better."* He was so insistent that I, too, left in 1923 for the French Seminary. Do you see how Providence directs everything? If the war had not come, my brother would have entered a missionary congregation and I would have entered the diocesan seminary of Lille; I would not have gone to Rome. That would have completely changed my life.

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<sup>1</sup> Achille Liénart, born in 1884 at Lille, had been a professor in the major seminary of Saint-Saulve from 1910–1919. In 1919, he was named dean of Saint Christopher's Church in Tourcoing. Appointed bishop of Lille in 1928, cardinal in 1930, he was, until Vatican Council II, one of the leading figures of the French progressives.



## Chapter 2

### *Toward the Priesthood*

I therefore left for the French Seminary in Rome, and I thank the Good Lord every day that my father had wanted it, and that he did not give in to my wishes. It was quite a revelation for me: Father Le Floch and the professors taught us how we should view current events, exposed errors to us—liberalism, modernism, and so many others of which we were not well aware—and taught us how we must search for the truth in the papal encyclicals, particularly those of Saint Pius X, Leo XIII, and all the popes who had preceded them.

That is what we studied in the seminary. For me personally, it was truly a revelation. And it was thus that there awakened very slowly in us (there were two hundred and twenty of us) this desire to conform our judgment to that of the popes. We would ask, *"How did the popes judge the events, ideas, men, and things of their times, of their age?"* And Father Le Floch clearly showed us, through the various papal encyclicals, what had been

the guiding principles—always the same, exactly the same—of these popes. This truly enlightened us, showed us how history was to be judged, how events were to be judged, where error was, where truth was, how one was to think... It was an absolute revelation, and as a result, it stayed with us. We remained attached to all those beautiful papal encyclicals which showed us where the truth is, the sources of evil, the sources of error, and what is bad in the world today.

This was a first stage in my life, and you see well how God was guiding me by little happenings. Take, for example, the fact of my brother having studied under Father Colin, who was attached to Rome and who advised my father to send him to Rome. If my brother had not been there where this well-known Father Colin was, we would not have been directed to Rome, and I would have remained in the diocese. Isn't it incredible how Providence arranges things!

So I was led, in spite of my misgivings, to the French Seminary where my brother was. This seminary, run by the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers, was under the rectorship of Reverend Father Le Floch.

As I told you, for me the French Seminary was a true revelation and a guiding light for my whole priestly and episcopal life: to view events in the spirit of the sovereign pontiffs who had succeeded one another for



*Reverend Father Le Floch,  
rector of the seminary.*

*A group of  
seminarians with  
Reverend Father Le  
Floch. Marcel Lefebvre  
is in the second row  
on the far left.*



close to a century and a half—especially the events which followed the French Revolution and all the errors which sprang up from those movements of ideas contrary to the Church's doctrine. Since the popes had denounced and condemned them, we also had to condemn them.

However, as it so often happens in cases like these, the defenders of the Church, the defenders of truth and of the Church's Tradition, bring down upon themselves the anger of all who think that one must compromise with the world, that one must adapt himself to the times and not condemn error, saying, *"Let us proclaim truth, but let us not condemn error."* This kind of person has two sides to him, and is very dangerous. He calls himself Catholic, yet at the same time, sides with the Church's enemies. He cannot bear the truth, the unchanging and complete truth. He cannot bear the fact that we are fighting against error, that we are fighting against the world, Satan, and the Church's enemies, that we are always in a state of crusade. We are in a state of crusade, a state of continual combat. Our Lord Himself also proclaimed the truth. Well! They put Him to death. They put Him to death because He proclaimed the truth, because He said He was God. And He was. He could not say that He was not. And all the martyrs preferred to shed their blood, to give their life, rather than compromise with the pagans.

I spent six years in Rome (interrupted by a year of military service). It so happened that the first three years (1923–1924, 1924–1925, 1925–1926) Father Le Floch was the rector. I was also very happy to attend classes which were given to us by the Jesuits at the Gregorian University in Rome.

Called to military service during the years 1926 and 1927, I was fortunate, in a certain sense, not to have to witness the terrible maneuvering to remove dear Father Le Floch from his post as rector of the seminary. I learned of all this through letters from my confrères; and when I had finished my military service in November 1927 and returned to the seminary, I was given absolutely scandalous details about the way in which Father Le Floch had been removed, eliminated. Why? Because all the Freemasons already in the French government and all the liberals who hovered around them, feared that Father Le Floch's disciples—the priests formed by Father Le Floch in the truth, for the fight against error and evil, for the fight against Satan—would become bishops. Throughout the world, the majority of the bishops had studied in Rome; this is still true today, but it was especially true at that time. The liberals did, indeed, have reason to fear that among those two hundred and twenty seminarians (out of whom perhaps one hundred and eighty would become priests and return to France), a number would later be chosen as bishops. This turned out to be the case, as many of my confrères became bishops in France. Unfortunately, most did not have the

courage to uphold the Faith and the teaching they had received in the French Seminary. The conditions of the world, the liberal world in which we live, everyday life, poisons one slowly but surely.

I was told how it all happened. Government emissaries came to the Vatican and said: "*We do not want Father Le Floch to head the French Seminary anymore. He is a dangerous man; he is...*" Oh! You know the names which were given to him: integrist, fascist, ultramontain, and so on; it was easy to find offensive terms to blacken the situation. "*Father Le Floch is with Action Française;<sup>1</sup> Father Le Floch is a disciple of Maurras; Father Le Floch is this and that...*"

Pope Pius XI was a very intelligent man who had a great faith, and wrote wonderful encyclicals. Unfortunately, however, in the actual practice of government, he was weak—very weak—and rather tempted to become somewhat allied with the world. He not only deposed Father Le Floch, but also Cardinal Billot who was an eminent and extraordinary professor at the Gregorian University. His books of theology are magnificent. He was deposed for the same reason as Father Le Floch, because he was an upright man. He

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<sup>1</sup> A French periodical and political movement led by Charles Maurras. *Action Française*, using sound natural principles to fight against liberal democratization, was hated by liberal Catholics. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

would not compromise with error. For him it was always the fight for the unchanging truth, the fight against error, against liberalism, against modernism, just like Saint Pius X. He was a true disciple of Saint Pius X. So Cardinal Billot, being another target of the French government, was dismissed.

It was poor Pope Pius XI who, upon the request of the American bishops, brought about the massacre of the *Cristeros* in Mexico. The Mexican Catholics were defending themselves, wanting to fight against the masonic and anti-Christian, anti-Catholic government. They took up arms, as the Vendéans had done during the French Revolution, in order to save religion, to save the Catholic Faith. In the beginning the Pope had encouraged them; then one fine day, the Masonic American government which was supporting Mexico—Freemasonry again—insistently demanded that the American bishops have the fighting stopped. Oh, but they were not to worry because there would be an agreement with the Catholics! So the bishops put pressure on Pope Pius XI and the Pope ordered the *Cristeros* to lay down their arms. They laid down their arms and all of them were massacred. The government had them slaughtered in masses. Horrible, absolutely horrible! It was truly a betrayal for those poor people.

The same thing happened with *Action Française*. Pope Pius XI was pushed to condemn *Action Française* because *Action Française*, which was not strictly a Catholic movement, was a movement of reaction against the disorders which Freemasonry was bringing into France. *Action Française* advocated a sound, definitive reaction, a return to order, to discipline, to a moral code, to Christian morals. So the government, displeased with this movement also, insisted that Pope Pius XI condemn it. *Action Française* was made up of the best Catholics who were trying to put France back on the right track again. And yet Pope Pius XI condemned it. The best proof that his judgment was unsound is that when he died, his secretary of state, Pope Pius XII, who succeeded him, lifted the condemnation of the movement. It was too late! The evil had been done. *Action Française* had been ruined. It was frightening and had enormous consequences.

It was the same thing for Father Le Floch: an inquiry was made to see if blameworthy matter could be found concerning his direction of the seminary. It would not be hard; they could certainly find something, and would make Father Le Floch understand that it would be better for him to hand in his resignation and leave.



The inquiry was made by Dom Schuster,<sup>1</sup> an eminent Benedictine. The result of the investigation was completely favorable to Father Le Floch. Dom Schuster spoke very highly of Father Le Floch's conduct, his direction, his seminary, his influence on the seminarians, and his faith.

Father Le Floch's adversaries, furious at the outcome of this inquiry, succeeded in convincing the Pope to make a counter-inquiry and to appoint someone who, in fact, would have the duty of saying something which would cause Father Le Floch to be sent away. They ended up finding a seminary professor and one or two students who made a few critical remarks: "*He is too right-wing, too 'maurrassien,'<sup>2</sup> too anti-liberal, too... etc.*" It was enough. He was condemned and made to leave. It was absolutely odious.

Now this is exactly the same battle we are presently fighting. Why are we being persecuted? Why am I being persecuted today? And why are you, and all of us who

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<sup>1</sup> Dom Ildefonso Schuster, abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Saint Paul's Outside-the-Walls in Rome, was appointed apostolic visitor of the seminaries of the ecclesiastical province of Lombardy (1926-1928). He had been put in charge, moreover, of an apostolic visit to the French Seminary in Rome. In 1929, he was made archbishop of Milan and cardinal. He was beatified in 1996.

<sup>2</sup> A follower of Charles Maurras' movement *Action Française*.  
(TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

are in Tradition, being persecuted? Because we affirm the truth and condemn error; we condemn liberalism; we condemn modernism. This is inadmissible for the Conciliar Church. The Council has changed all this: now we are now supposed to be on good terms with the liberals, with the modernists, with the Freemasons, with the Communists, with everyone; we are supposed to be ecumenical with everyone. We are opposed, therefore we are against the Council, therefore we are against the Pope, condemned!... Yes, it is true, condemned! The reasons are the same; the combat is the same.

Once again, this was providential, a significant practical lesson for me, because it showed the malice and wickedness of the enemies of truth. Thus I was always wary, especially later when I became a bishop, of those people who continuously seek to compromise the Church, the clergy, and the bishops, with modern errors, with the modern world. This taught me to be watchful whenever I met with priests, or when I was visiting dioceses and heard reports about this or that. I immediately thought, *"Ah, perhaps they are opposed to each other because some are liberals and some are conservatives, traditionalists."* Always the same... This can be found almost everywhere.

So poor Father Le Floch left, and when I returned in 1927, Father Berthet had been appointed. He was two-faced, appearing traditional, but at the same time very easy-going... There was no longer any question of

condemnation, of fighting and combatting error. *Let us leave that aside; let us be prudent.*" This made the last years at the seminary somewhat difficult. There were, moreover, a certain number of seminarians who had not been able to bear Father Le Floch's condemnation and who had left the seminary at that time.

I was ordained in 1929 at Lille by Bishop Liénart, but it was customary to remain at the seminary for another year of studies as a priest. Available for the ministry in 1930, I returned to my diocese of Lille.

My brother, having entered the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1924, had finished his studies with them and left for Gabon the very year of his ordination, in 1927. As for me, Cardinal Liénart appointed me curate in the rather important town of *Marais-de-Lomme* (a suburb of Lille). It had about ten thousand inhabitants, almost all of whom were factory workers. It was an industrial town. The workers went to work in factories located in surrounding areas since there was only one factory within the limits of the parish. The town had long streets with all the houses built according to the same pattern. Many people from the Boulogne area, where there was quite a bit of unemployment, had moved to the North to find work.

We had to meet and visit these people for they had not yet been in contact with the parish. There was, however, a little group of faithful that was very fervent

and that led a very fervent parish life. Unfortunately, out of the ten thousand inhabitants, very few were practicing. There were maybe two thousand, counting the children, who assisted at Mass on Sunday.

### *First Assignment: Curate*

I thus received my assignment and the pastor was informed. He already had a curate. I contacted him, saying: "Well, here I am. What are you going to do with me?"

Since I was his second curate, he had a rather amusing remark to make. He spoke kindly and somewhat jokingly, but did say nevertheless:

*"Oh! To be honest with you, I did not ask for a second curate; I do not need one. I thought I had enough with one!"*

*"Oh really!"*

*"For a parish like ours, I do not see the necessity of having a second curate."*

*"I will try to keep busy nevertheless!"*

*"You are most welcome, of course; consider yourself at home here... We will make sure you have a bedroom..."*



*Father  
Marcel Lefebvre  
with his pastor  
(1931).*



*Farewell to the parish of Marais-de-Lomme (1932).*

He had two of his nieces taking care of the presbytery, the cooking, laundry, etc. They were good people. I already knew the other curate, who had formerly been a Sacred Heart student in Tourcoing. I had a few other acquaintances there as well, but of course I did not know the parish at all, or the majority of the people. The parish was new for me, but I admit that I became attached to the ministry of visiting the people. There were, of course, all kinds...

We divided the parish into sections. One section was allotted to the pastor, another section to the first curate, another to the second curate. We had to visit all those people. We were usually well received, kindly received. Sometimes there were Communists though, who would close the door in our face... Then we would go to the neighbor's and ask:

*"What is it with the man next door? Why was he so unfriendly?"*

*"He is a fanatical Communist," the neighbor would say. "That is why he refused to welcome you. But he is not a bad man. I will try to talk to him; we will try to settle things so that he will eventually welcome you."*

And in fact, when we went a second time, he would open the door after all.

We tried to find out a little what the people's situations were, and very often, unfortunately, they were divorced or unmarried people who were living together. The children were not going to catechism, etc. Anyway, we had to try to bring all those people into the parish, which was not always an easy thing to do, as you might imagine. We did nevertheless have good results because deep down the people were not bad; they had to be given the opportunity to know the parish and the priests a little better. It was already a positive step for them to come in contact with the priest, and this is how we were able to regularize a good number of situations.

There were also regular visits to the sick which were interesting. There were the confessions, there was the preaching, there were the catechism classes, the children's club, the youth group, and you name it. Work was not lacking and these contacts with such simple, working people—they were uncultured, but good people—were enjoyable.

**But Providence did not want me to stay there...**

## Chapter 3

### *Soon a Religious and Missionary*

I will continue my story... I was, therefore, curate in the parish of *Marais-de-Lomme*, a suburb of Lille, which had a pastor and a first curate. During the year I spent there, 1930–1931, I would frequently receive letters from my brother who was already a missionary in Gabon. In them he would describe his work and that of his confrères. They were overloaded with work; there were not enough missionaries, and he became insistent: “*Why don’t you come? After all, there are quite enough priests in the diocese of Lille.*” This corresponded, more or less, to what the pastor had said to me when I arrived at *Marais-de-Lomme*. He had said to me, “*I welcome you with pleasure, of course, but I really do not need a second curate.*”



In spite of my brother's insistence, the missions did not attract me. I do not know why... No, I was not made to be a missionary in faraway places; this did not appeal to me. I preferred, as I told you, to be a pastor or a curate in a village, and to know all the people, to do them some good. But as for traveling through the African forests in the midst of the natives, learning new languages, in a word, living in a world completely unfamiliar to me, I felt all this would be too much, that it was not for me. It truly did not attract me. But by dint of hearing my brother's appeals... reason led me to my missionary vocation. "Well," I thought, *"since I am not absolutely indispensable here and they have such a shortage of people over there, why not? Why not go!"*

So at the end of the year, I wrote to Cardinal Liénart and then to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers saying that if the cardinal gave me permission to leave the diocese, I would willingly enter the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers to be a missionary. The response from the cardinal was favorable. "Yes, surely," he said. *"We are, of course, always sorry to see one of our priests leave, but if you truly think you will be useful to the missions, we cannot refuse your request."*

## *In the Novitiate*

The Holy Ghost Fathers, of course, were happy to receive a secular priest because they did not even have to take care of his formation. I had been their student at the French Seminary, it is true, but it was for the Lille diocese rather than for them; they had not contributed in a positive way to my formation. So they were obviously happy to receive me.

I thus entered the novitiate at Orly, very close to the present-day airport where the Holy Ghost Fathers had some property for the novitiate. There were three of us priests, all former students at the French Seminary. Father Laurent was one of them. We had been friends at the seminary, never thinking that Providence would one day lead us to the same novitiate. Providence again!... We renewed our friendship which became even deeper since we both became Holy Ghost Fathers. There was also Father Wolff who became a bishop in Madagascar, in the Diégo-Suarez diocese. So there were three of us priests and a total of about eighty novices—for France alone! That is an enormous number. When you think of numbers like this, you wonder how it was possible since now there is nothing.

Father Faure was the master of novices and Father Desmats was the confessor. They were very good Holy Ghost Fathers. We spent a year in the novitiate; my goodness, it was a cold year! To think it possible to make novices suffer like that—incredible! I do not know if it was an exceptionally cold year, but I think it was. In any case, we did not have heat in our bedrooms; only the community room was heated. And we did not have running water at that time either. We would go with a basin to get water from a faucet at the end of a hallway and the water would freeze in the basin! In the morning we had to break the ice so that we could wash ourselves a little... We used four, five, six blankets which added weight but did not give warmth. We were always just as cold. Oh! It was awful. I do not know how I did not die from the cold.

To top it off, they made us read the four volumes of Father Rodriguez, a Jesuit: *Practice of Perfection*. We had to read Rodriguez, walking one behind the other in the courtyard outside!!! It was terribly cold! We would lose all feeling in our fingers as we held the book; but we read, walking one behind the other, just like that. Ah! That was the novitiate.

## *Religious Profession and First Assignment*

Well, my novitiate ended and I made profession on September 8, 1932, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Then I received my assignment for Gabon. I could have been appointed elsewhere, but since it had clearly been my brother who had drawn me to the missions...

Bishop Tardy, the bishop of Gabon, had already come to see me in the novitiate. *"You know, you will be joining us in Gabon,"* he said.

*"I don't know anything about it,"* I replied. *"That depends on the superior general."*

*"Oh, yes! I am sure of it. You must certainly not refuse! Your brother is there; you must follow your brother."*

*"If the superior general agrees, I will go."*

*"And since you did your studies in Rome, you will be a professor at the seminary."*

Oh!... As for that... That was the thing which frightened me the most. Oh no! It could not be! I really liked pastoral work; I really liked the ministry; I felt as if I was made for that. But a professor, ah... no, no, a seminary professor, no.

*"You know," I said to him, "I am not more apt than others! Don't think I will make a better professor just because I went to Rome."*

But he insisted: *"Ah! But yes! Yes, yes!"*

### *In Gabon: Professor and Rector*

The superior general thus named me to Gabon and I left in October. Since there were not any planes at that time, I embarked on a boat which took two weeks to get to Gabon. I said goodbye to my parents and left in October 1932. I would, moreover, never see my mother again, for she would die in 1938. I was not able to see her again because I was still over there when she died.

I was named to the seminary where Father Fauret<sup>1</sup> was rector. Then, two years later, Bishop Tardy appointed me as rector. As assistant, I had Father Berger, who has unfortunately passed away. We had to take care of the young seminarians. It was not a small job to provide all the classes, for along with fifteen or so older students, there were about fifteen junior seminarians. How could we teach all those classes? In order to reduce the

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<sup>1</sup> Father Jean-Baptiste Fauret was later named superior of Saint Francis Xavier Mission in Lambaréné. He became vicar apostolic of Loango on February 13, 1947.



*Rector of the seminary at Libreville in Gabon (1935).  
Marcel Lefebvre is on the left.*



*Libreville Bay  
viewed from  
Sainte-Marie.*

workload, we organized the classes in cycles, year by year, so as to have all the seminarians at the same time. Some of those seminarians are now Gabonese bishops.

Bishop Ndong was my student and became bishop of Oyem in Gabon. Bishop Félicien Makouaka,<sup>1</sup> who is now bishop of Franceville, at the far end of Gabon, was likewise my student as was Bishop Cyriaque Obamba,<sup>2</sup> who is still a bishop today at Mouila. On the other hand, the present-day archbishop of Libreville, Bishop Anguilé, was not my student. Quite a few priests who are still living were also my students.

Among the junior seminarians under my care, there were some who left. They are certainly older than sixty now; sixty-five, seventy years old. Some of them knew me well; and that, thank God, facilitated Father Groche's<sup>3</sup> establishment of the mission in Gabon. If my brother and I had not been missionaries in Gabon, we would never have been able to set up a mission of the Society there. The bishops would have exerted so much pressure, and in such a way, that the government would have forbidden us to establish a mission. It was, however, difficult for these bishops, who were once my students,

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Makouaka is now bishop emeritus of Franceville. Bishop Modibo-Nzockena succeeded him in November 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Obamba passed away on July 7, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Father Patrick Groche, ordained in 1976, is a priest of the Society of Saint Pius X. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)



*Terrace of the N'djolé Mission overlooking the five hundred mile long Ogooué River.*



*In the footsteps of their founder, the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X at Donguila (1993). They are in front of the church enlarged by Father Marcel about sixty years previously.*



to turn me away and truly wage war against me. So it was certainly a special grace of God that the Society of Saint Pius X was able to establish itself in Gabon. It is a great consolation for me to think that once again the flame is spreading in Gabon, thanks to Father Groche and the priests who are with him, who are reviving Tradition, reviving what we once gave to those bishops. What I once did for them is what we are continuing to do now.

### *Sickness, Then the N'djolé Mission*

I thus spent six years at the seminary: two years as professor and four years as rector. The work was very hard and the climate dreadful, so many young missionaries who were sent into that country died after two or three years. When we went to the cemetery, we would read on the tombs of our missionaries: died at twenty-six years old, died at twenty-seven years old, died at twenty-eight years old. The climate was difficult to bear. At that time, it was hard to protect oneself from all the different insects and diseases: malaria, filariasis, amoebic dysentery, intestinal worms, the tsetse (sleeping) fly—it was frightening. There was also bilious hematoma which is an internal hemorrhage in a malfunctioning liver because of the food and heat. Bilious hematoma was very serious and life threatening. After two years there, my brother became very ill. As for me, at the end of my



sixth year, I was half dead and I could no longer continue the work. I did not have any more strength; I was completely exhausted.

Now at that time, as a rule, we were to return to France only every ten years. I had been given permission to return in 1939. I left the seminary beforehand, in 1938, and spent a year on a mission inland.

I was more comfortable there, but I had to learn the language. I was very happy at this mission of N'djolé, as a curate with Father Ndong, the future Bishop Ndong. We got on well together. The Sisters of Castres, of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, were there as missionaries. We always had a school in each one of our missions... At N'djolé, we had ninety boys and sixty, seventy girls. The Sisters took care of the girls who were all boarders, and we, the Fathers, took care of the boys' school. We also made the rounds of the back country.

### *War of 1939—Mobilization*

I returned to Europe in 1939, at the beginning of the war. The war caught us by surprise near English Guinea in Freetown. The commanding officer warned Father Verhille and me (we had grown up together). He said, "*I think there is going to be a war.*" And war was in fact declared. When it happened, we returned to

Freetown to camouflage the whole boat, so that no light could be seen from it and so that it would not be torpedoed by a submarine. We then returned to Europe. At Dakar, we waited for awhile and then, from there, we were taken by convoy. Two or three military boats escorted five or six passenger boats to protect them from possible submarine attacks; for since the declaration of the war, some passenger boats had been sunk along the Mauritanian coastline.

We reached Bordeaux without mishap, but since it was wartime, we were drafted. A month later, I had to return to Africa again, but as a soldier! Before leaving, I had just the time to see for a few days my father, and my brothers and sisters who were there.

### *Return to Africa—Demobilization*

I had to leave from Bordeaux, re-embarking on a boat which was again escorted by military boats as far as Dakar. Afterwards, the boat went on to Libreville and there I was discharged.

### *Donguila Mission*

I was appointed by Bishop Tardy to Donguila, a mission in the bush. And there—after all, it was wartime—I was once again drafted, sent to Chad, etc.,

pointless trips. We were afterwards brought back to Gabon. We suffered a lot because Gabon had been invaded by General de Gaulle's troops, assisted by the English; and this brought convicts and Communists to the country. It was awful; the sight of the French fighting against each other was a very bad example for the natives. It was lamentable. Bishop Tardy was even detained for awhile aboard the boat sent by General de Gaulle. His release had to be negotiated. These were incredible things which obviously scandalized those poor black people. It was a bad example and did not facilitate our ministry.

### *Other Missions*

I was appointed to several missions: to Libreville for awhile, to Donguila, then afterwards to Lambaréné, where the highly renowned Doctor Schweitzer was. A great musician, a great performer of Bach, a doctor, and a Protestant pastor, he had been a professor at the Protestant University of Strasbourg. Anyway, he was in Lambaréné, in the hospital which he was building and developing. He had very good relations with the Catholic mission and I had the opportunity to meet him several times.

## New Assignment

One day while I was making the rounds in a small motorboat with a few children, I saw a pirogue coming in the distance. I did not recognize it, but children have good eyes.

*"Father," they said to me, "that is a pirogue from the mission. It is a pirogue which is coming from the mission."*

*"From the mission? Why? What is the matter? What are they coming to do? Do they have news to give?"*

*"Ah! Yes, it is certainly a pirogue from the mission; it surely is."*

And in fact, the pirogue was heading toward us. It drew alongside us...

*"Ah! Father, there is an urgent letter which came for you."*

Dear, oh, dear! The year was 1945, toward the end of the war. The means of communication having been re-established, it was the renowned Father Laurent (Father Laurent who had been with me in the novitiate) who, having become the provincial of France, was asking Bishop Tardy to be willing at any cost to part with me, so I could be appointed rector of the seminary of philosophy

at Mortain. Dear, oh dear! I could have wept... Oh! I did not want to go back to Europe anymore: my mother had passed away, my father was in a concentration camp, and as for my brothers and sisters, they were settled in life. If it were up to me, I would have remained there in Gabon for good without ever returning to France. Oh! It was a heavy trial for me, I can assure you! There I was, obliged to leave Gabon!

### *Return to Europe*

So, one stage followed another. The Gabon stage was ending: thirteen years in the missions of Gabon. Now it was to be a short stay in Europe. I left Gabon in 1945, at the end of the war. The military planes, which had begun contact with the colonies again, brought back on their first trips either elderly persons, sick people, or those who had special reasons for leaving. The Congregation's authorities succeeded in having me embark on one of the first planes which was leaving Libreville for France. Nowadays it takes six or seven hours to fly to Gabon, but at that time, even by plane, it took three days... The first stage was to Douala, the second stage to Kano in northern Nigeria, the third stage to Algiers, then from Algiers on to Paris. The planes did not fly during the night, and they were small planes which went very slowly. I left with one of my confrères who was somewhat ill, and we returned to France.

## *Rector of the Seminary at Mortain*

I was sent to be the rector of the seminary at Mortain, the seminary of the Holy Ghost Fathers. Mortain was a very beautiful building, at least artistically speaking. It was an old eleventh century abbatial, a little like that of Ruffec,<sup>1</sup> somewhat smaller and a little narrower, but also very beautiful, with nice transepts, and entirely renovated by the Historical Monuments Society. It was absolutely magnificent and had with it a building which had formerly been the minor seminary of the diocese. During the war, it had been closed down and used for the wounded and the sick; then it had been given, little by little, to the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers to be used as their seminary of philosophy.

The seminary comprised one hundred and ten students for two years of philosophy, with fifty-five students per year, which at that time was tremendous, outstanding. We would like to have as many. There was, of course, a teaching staff, professors of philosophy and of all the related subjects. I was the rector, and would give the spiritual conferences in the evening. From these

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<sup>1</sup> Ruffec is the location of the French-speaking novitiate of the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X. Its abbatial was finished in the twelfth century. It is situated fourteen miles from the motherhouse of the Society Sisters in Saint Michel en Brenne, France. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

conferences came little booklets which I later photocopied. I spent two years there, completely different from those in Gabon of course, but with good young people who had just come out of the novitiate, and who were consequently still filled with the zeal of the novitiate, waiting to leave for the seminary of theology which was at Chevilly-Larue, very close to Paris.



## Chapter 4

### *Rome Calls, the Episcopacy*

**A**t the end of my second year as rector of the seminary at Mortain, during the month of June, the vice-rector came to find me.

*"The superior general is on the phone and wants to speak to you,"* he said.

Bishop Le Hunsec said to me:

*"Father, brace yourself. You have been... appointed vicar apostolic of Dakar!"*

Vicar apostolic of Dakar! Practically speaking, that meant bishop of Dakar.

If he had told me that I had been appointed vicar apostolic of Gabon—although I was not at all eager to be vicar apostolic or a bishop under any circumstance whatsoever; I really did not seek it—I would have

understood. I had come from Gabon. After thirteen years in the missions, I knew the Fathers, I knew the language, I knew many of the people. I would immediately have had good contact with the Fathers and the whole Catholic community of Gabon.

But Dakar! Going through Dakar, you would practically see only Moslems; not many Fathers, not many Catholic centers. To go to a diocese like that, where I did not know anyone, neither the Fathers who were there, nor the congregations of Sisters (the Sisters of Cluny and the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Castres)!... I would have to be introduced to everything, and would find myself right in the midst of Moslems who were very much in the majority. Out of three and a half million inhabitants, three million were Moslems, around fifty thousand were Catholics, and the rest were animists. Whatever; I did not have a choice. Bishop Le Hunsec said: *"You are a religious; you have to obey! You don't have the choice between yes and no. You are obliged to answer yes."* So what could I do?

I went to Paris therefore, met the superior general, and it was decided who would consecrate me a bishop. It was going to be a big change for me. I realized that to be a missionary or even the rector of a seminary meant being in direct contact with the people, with the faithful. A bishop, however, is on a higher plane. His contact is with the missionaries, and there is no longer any direct contact with the people. Even aside from that, the very

fact of being a bishop sets one a certain distance from the people: *"Did you see! His Excellency, His Excellency! You are going to receive the bishop!..."* Oh! And right away it is as if he is on a pedestal, you understand, and he no longer has any contacts... With that, of course, comes greater responsibilities. The spiritual responsibility of a whole diocese is not a small thing.

### *Episcopal Consecration*

Since Cardinal Liénart was the bishop of Lille (the bishop who had ordained me a priest), he was asked if he would agree to perform the consecration. He did agree and it was decided that the consecration would take place on September 18 in my native parish of Our Lady of Tourcoing. In the customary speech, I alluded to the formation which I had received from Father Le Floch at the French Seminary. I spoke of how grateful I was to Father Le Floch for having given me sound principles of the Faith, for having attached me to Our Lord in life and in death, and for having helped me understand the drama which the Church was going through, the errors contrary to truth and against Our Lord. Well, this did not pass unnoticed! Of course no one said anything to me at the time, but the cardinal had been listening and found nothing better than to go and tell everything to the nuncio in Paris who was Bishop Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII.

## *Vicar Apostolic of Dakar*

Then I left—I think it was during the month of October—for Dakar, where the authorities and the Fathers gave me a warm reception. So there I was, responsible for this diocese; I was going to devote myself to it as well as I could, to the best of my ability. One of the first projects I wanted to undertake was to found a boys' school, because one was truly lacking. There were girls' schools, functioning very well, run by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny and the Sisters of Castres. They had four magnificent private schools for girls, but there was nothing for boys. So the families immediately came to me:

*"Your Excellency, we hope that you are going to do something to give us a school for our boys. We have everything that we need for the girls, but not what we need for the boys."*

*"It is surprising," I said, "that there is no school for boys."*

So I began looking. A year later I again left for France in order to meet the Marist Fathers, particularly Father Thomas, the superior of the French province, who was at Saint-Brieuc.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Saint-Brieuc is located in the northwestern part of France. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)



*The Dakar cathedral—south portal.*



*Taking possession of the episcopal see of Dakar  
on November 16, 1947.*

## *Apostolic Delegate*

When I arrived at our motherhouse in September 1948, the superior general was on the lookout for me. He came to the door.

*"Come in, Your Excellency, come in. I have something to tell you."*

*"What is it?... What do they want of me now?"*

*"Come, come into the parlor."*

Then he said: *"You are not going to say no! You have been appointed apostolic delegate by the Pope."*

*"What does that mean? I am the vicar apostolic of Dakar, the bishop of the diocese of Dakar. Apostolic delegate? What does that mean?"*

*"You will be responsible, under the Pope, for all the French-speaking dioceses in Africa. You will have to establish contacts. And it is, moreover, very simple; the Pope is expecting you in October. You must go to Rome. You will be received by the Pope; then you will go to the offices in Rome. They will tell you what you have to do."*

Oh my!!! Couldn't they just leave me in peace? To leave and have to travel all over Africa! And the other congregations? The White Fathers, the Jesuit Fathers,

the African Mission Fathers of Lyon... They would be jealous if the apostolic delegate coming to visit them was a Holy Ghost Father. Oh my!

*"You aren't going to refuse! It is an honor for the Congregation; we have never had an apostolic delegate!"*

*"Fine,"* I answered. *"I am quite willing to accept..."*  
(Oh! That is all very well, but... Oh my! Oh my!)

So I left and went to see the Holy Father. He received me like a true father and I immediately felt that there was great union of thought, that we were well united in the desire to extend Our Lord's kingdom and to live truly the Christian and priestly life... I was really touched by this visit with Pope Pius XII. We spoke together and he said that he was relying on me to develop the evangelization of the whole African territory, that I would not only have to direct, but to visit. I would have to give an account of what I saw and heard, give suggestions for evangelization, encourage the bishops, and also set up episcopal conferences in the different territories. *"All this,"* he added, *"will be told to you by the cardinal prefect of the Propaganda whom, of course, you must go and see; he will give you very precise instructions regarding everything."* In any case, the Holy Father hoped that the collaboration would be very efficacious, very good, very fruitful, and he was also ready to help and receive me if I needed to see him.

I went to see the cardinal prefect of the Propaganda who explained to me exactly what the situation was. *"You will have forty-six dioceses to visit,"* he said. *"See if the number of dioceses should be increased or decreased, if new bishops should be made... When a bishop resigns or dies, you will be in charge of submitting names to Rome for the appointment of other bishops, etc. That means there will be dossiers to prepare. You will have to establish contact with the superiors general of the religious congregations, as the nomination of bishops also pertains to them, for they must tell you which of their subjects would be the most apt for the episcopacy, etc., etc."*

My, oh my, oh my!! I who thought only of quietly remaining in Dakar to take care of my diocese! *"You will have an auxiliary,"* I was told. Two years later, in 1950, I did in fact receive one: Bishop Guibert whom I had consecrated in the Dakar cathedral. He helped me a little in the diocese, since I was practically always away. As you can easily understand, I had to be travelling constantly: visiting dioceses, calling the bishops together... Forty-six dioceses is not a small thing, and they were far away: Madagascar, Reunion, Djibouti, Morocco, all of French Equatorial Africa, all of Western French Africa, Cameroon. Weeks and weeks were needed for all these visits, as you can imagine.





*His Holiness Pius XII receives Archbishop Lefebvre  
who is accompanied by his secretary,  
the Reverend Father Perraud (1948).*



*The Archbishop with his sister, Mother Mary Gabriel,  
and their brother René.*



*Welcoming Archbishop Lefebvre, the apostolic delegate,  
at Pointe-Noire Airport (1952).*



*Archbishop Lefebvre visiting the apostolic vicariate of  
Laghoutat on November 24, 1952.*



## *Expansion of the Missions*

On top of all that, if a bishop needed to be appointed, I had to go and see the superior general of the congregation concerned. That meant going to Rome since that is where the congregations generally were. It was necessary to discuss the nomination in question, and without fail, to see the Congregation of the Propaganda. I was also asked to establish the apostolic delegation, which is different from the diocese: the apostolic delegation was needed as well as the bishopric. I also endeavored to satisfy the requests of the bishops who desired to have teaching Brothers or Sisters for their dioceses. I would try to get in touch with the superiors general of the religious congregations and encourage them to send Sisters to Africa, to the places where they had been requested. I made proposals to them.

These were obviously very, very, busy years. However, I have to admit that I did not expect them to be so encouraging, even elating. I was able to see in the territory of all these dioceses how much the missions had developed since 1946, between the war and the Council, a time span of a good ten, almost fifteen years.

There was an extraordinary development of the missions, extraordinary! Seminaries were built and the number of priests increased. Many religious congregations came. (Having priests, they were able to send missionaries.)

Multiple foundations were made, and the number of missions, convents, and institutions of all kinds was augmented. We found Sisters for clinics and hospitals. I had the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary come in order to work in the hospitals, the Sisters of Saint Thomas of Villanova, nursing Sisters... A great number of teaching Sisters also came to Africa to help. The expansion was magnificent, extraordinary, and truly encouraging. They were remarkable years.

Every year I would go to see Pope Pius XII, and this naturally gave me the opportunity to come in contact with many persons of the Roman Curia. Sometimes I had to see the Congregation for Religious, other times the Congregation of the Propaganda, the Holy Office, or the Secretariat of State. As apostolic delegate, I was answerable, like the nuncios, to the Secretariat of State, for which I had been given a secret correspondence code. I also had to report on the condition of each diocese, and all this necessarily put me in contact with many cardinals, many monsignors...in short, with the whole Roman Curia.

I sensed very well that there were some in Rome who supported me, and fortunately, the Pope in particular. The Holy Father encouraged me very much, which was obviously a great help. I also had the support of Cardinal Tardini of the Secretariat of State. However,



*The occasion of the centenary of the Daughters of the Holy Heart of Mary, a Senegalese congregation founded in 1858.*



*The Archbishop at Yaunde in Cameroon.*

there were a certain number—among whom were Bishop Montini (the future Pope Paul VI), Bishop Martin who was of the Secretariat of State at that time, and other monsignors of the Propaganda—who treated me almost as if I had robbed them of a position. Apostolic delegate! That was almost a nuncio! And without having gone through the usual steps of being a nunciature's secretary, a secretary of this, a secretary of that... And without having made it a career! *"You did not go through the Academy of Noble Ecclesiastics in Rome which forms future diplomats, nuncios... To become archbishop of Dakar right away and then, bang, apostolic delegate! You are an intruder! You have taken a position which could have been given to us."* So there was a certain mistrust...

### *Apostolic Delegation Terminated Archbishop of Dakar*

I reached the end of my mandate as apostolic delegate in 1959. Pope Pius XII had passed away in 1958; it was he who had appointed and, I can say, truly supported me. I saw him almost every year which was obviously a great encouragement and a great consolation for me. He was truly a man of God, a man of the Church.



When I occasionally went to Paris as apostolic delegate, I would sometimes meet Bishop Roncalli<sup>1</sup> at the nunciature. Each time that I went there, he would not only invite but absolutely insist on seeing me. Well, he made the comment to me one time: *"If you ask me, I don't think archbishops like you, who have a diocese, should also, at the same time, be apostolic delegate. To me it isn't a good idea; I do not agree with Pope Pius XII on this point."*

Bah! That was none of my business, was it? But he had made that remark to me. So, of course when he was elected pope in 1958, I said to myself: *"There you are! This will not last long. I will no doubt receive an invitation from Rome asking me to give up one position or the other."* And that is what happened.

Less than a year later, I received a letter from Rome telling me I was to choose between remaining archbishop of Dakar (therefore the Dakar diocese) or apostolic delegate, as thenceforth the two offices would be separate. I replied: *"It is not up to me to choose because I was not the one who appointed myself to either office. Consequently, I leave it up to the authorities who made the appointments; they must tell me if I am to remain apostolic delegate or rather archbishop of Dakar."*

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop Roncalli was apostolic nuncio in France from 1944–1953. Named patriarch of Venice and cardinal in 1953, he was elected Pope in 1958 under the name of John XXIII.

Then came an answer typical of Rome, "*Since you have chosen to continue in the office of archbishop of Dakar, you will indeed remain archbishop and will no longer be apostolic delegate.*" Ah, what nerve! I still have the letter, Rome's answer. They did not want to shoulder the responsibility, you see, so they found a very simple way out of it: to put it on me, saying, "*Since you have chosen to be archbishop of Dakar...*" Fine!

It was thus understood that I would remain archbishop of Dakar, but that I was no longer apostolic delegate. I remained archbishop of Dakar from 1959 to 1962, but I no longer had the responsibility of all those dioceses and apostolic delegations as in the past. My auxiliary, Bishop Guibert, no longer being absolutely necessary (since thenceforth all my time could be spent taking care of the Dakar diocese) was named bishop of Reunion.

### *Resignation as Archbishop of Dakar*

Political events became more and more clear after the war. In the colonies, a wind of independence blew, generally coming from the United States, an independence—political, economic, religious—which was even favored by many members of the clergy. From a religious point of view, independence very simply meant replacing the European bishops with African bishops.

At Dakar, I fully realized (as did the other bishops) that little by little we were becoming undesirable, a burden, that it was thought we should leave our positions to Africans. There was no problem if Rome was in agreement... And it did seem to be Rome's desire. I heard Bishop Constantini making a remark to the Congregation of the Propaganda which seemed incredible to me, and in my opinion, completely false. *"If you think that it is the European bishops who are truly going to convert Africa and other mission countries, you are mistaken,"* he said. *"There need to be African bishops."* That there be African bishops was fine with me; I was not against African bishops. But they also had to be capable; and they also had to have the means to continue the apostolate.

In the month of January 1962, I could tell that things were starting to speed up... Since I was part of the Council's Preparatory Commission, I had to go to Rome several times a year. Taking advantage of the situation, I wrote a letter to the Propaganda. *"If you wish to put someone else in my place,"* I said, *"I would be willing to hand in my resignation and return to Europe. I would have no problem with that."* And they answered: *"Fine, we accept your resignation. You will go back to Europe."*

At the same time, I personally asked to be able to wait six months before receiving another position, if they wanted to appoint me elsewhere. The Holy Ghost Fathers were going to have a General Chapter on August 22, 1962. According to conversations which I had had with my confrères, it was possible, and even probable—not that I wished it!—that I would be elected superior general. I had the intention, if I was indeed elected, to perfect my English, of which I knew very little, because we had in the Congregation immense English-speaking territories, an enormous number of parishes in America, etc. We had a tremendous ministry in those countries. Since I did not speak English fluently, the delay would have facilitated my task.

*"No, no, it is out of the question. You must be a bishop in France."* A bishop in France... Well, we would see about that! I knew what the bishops of France thought of me!... They were afraid of me, in a certain sense, because I was a so-called *traditionalist* or *integrist* even then, due to the fact that I had supported Jean Ousset's organization.

Jean Ousset had founded a movement for the laity in France called *"La Cité Catholique."* I often visited Solesmes,<sup>1</sup> and one day the prior of Solesmes said to me

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<sup>1</sup> Solesmes is a Benedictine motherhouse and monastery in France, revived by Dom Prosper Guéranger in 1837. It is renowned for the restoration of the true Gregorian chant of the Church at Pope Saint Pius X's request. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)



*The Archbishop  
climbs into a  
plane which  
brings him to  
Rome.*



*The "Coetus Internationalis Patrum" in Rome  
(1964 or 1965).*

(I was still in Dakar): "Your Excellency, you should support these good people. They are very courageous; they have a strong faith; they are militant and are trying hard to make contacts with the bishops. The bishops are wary of them though, and so they are not really very supportive. You would do them a service if you went to see them, said that you are in agreement with them, and that you will help their movement to restore Catholic principles."

So I got in touch with them. Then they published the book *Pour Qu'Il Règne*<sup>1</sup> (their charter, as it were), a big book, a very beautiful book which is worth reading even now. We read it at Ecône a few times because it is an excellent book, a book of faith in Christendom, in Our Lord, in the social kingship of Our Lord—a magnificent book! They asked me if I would write the preface. I sent a letter; I wrote the preface. The bishops of France who were against this movement—"La Cité Catholique"—were furious: "That's it! Archbishop Lefebvre has to interfere with our business again by writing a letter for 'La Cité Catholique!'"

I was not very warmly welcomed. The best proof is that since John XXIII was absolutely determined I should have a diocese in France, then, being an archbishop, I should have had an archbishopric. That would have been the normal thing. There was, in fact,

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<sup>1</sup> *So That He May Reign* (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)

an archbishopric which was vacant at the time, that of Albi. I could very well have been archbishop of Albi, which is not such a large diocese anyway.

The bishops of France, however, laid down conditions. They said: *"If you absolutely insist on appointing Archbishop Lefebvre to a bishopric in France, we ask:*

– *"Firstly, that he not be a member of the Assembly of cardinals and archbishops."* (At that time, episcopal conferences which brought all the bishops together did not exist. It was only the Assembly of cardinals and archbishops which directed, in a certain way, the French episcopacy. So, being an archbishop, I should normally have been a member of that assembly; it was obvious.)

– *"Secondly, that he have only a small diocese and not an archdiocese."*

– *"And thirdly, that this not be considered a precedent."*

Three conditions! I read the bishops' letter, which was addressed to the Pope. You see how they welcomed their confrère in the episcopate! See the episcopal charity of the bishops of France. Bah! Insofar as I was personally concerned, it made no difference; it did not matter! Not to be a member of the Assembly of cardinals and bishops—that was not important! And to have a small

diocese—I did not care! A small diocese was fine with me. To borrow a sentence of Saint Francis de Sales: "*A single soul is a large diocese.*" "Well," I said, "*I have two hundred and twenty thousand souls; that makes even a great diocese!*"

I answered Rome: "*As far as I am concerned, I am ready to accept whatever you give me. Once again, I would really rather not have one; I would rather not bind myself to a diocese. But if you appoint me to a diocese, well, that is fine.*"

### *Bishop of Tulle*

I was thus named bishop of Tulle! I knew nothing, truly nothing about the diocese of Tulle, which is a diocese lost in the Massif Central.<sup>1</sup> I did not even know exactly where Tulle was. Anyway!... So of course I had to go see the vicars-general. I met the former bishop, Bishop Chassagne, to find out a little what the situation was in the diocese. He had resigned. He was a very holy, very good bishop who received me with great kindness. The vicars-general also received me amiably. Everything went well.

I did not really have any difficulties. At least I was already somewhat accustomed to running a diocese. Unfortunately, this poor diocese—like many of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Massif Central is in the central part of France. (TRANSLATOR'S NOTE)





*April 1962—Bishop of Tulle.*



*The Archbishop's kindness during his visits.*

dioceses of France—was in an incredibly sorry state. There was decline in every domain: no more vocations, so the Sisters were leaving the villages where they had been, abandoning their hospitals or closing their Catholic schools; fewer and fewer priests, therefore more and more parishes for each priest; scarcely any vocations in the seminary, three or four vocations for the diocese... It was a diocese which was dying... There were ways to revive it. I endeavored to meet with the priests, to go and see them, to encourage them. *"Everything is not lost,"* I told them. *"We will try to establish Catholic schools, for that is where children will be found who have vocations. We will work to support the only diocesan congregation of Sisters, founded in the diocese."* The Sisters were taking care of a lot of parishes—somewhat as you do—health clinics, small elementary schools, helping priests in the parishes. They were an incredible help and loved by the people. So I encouraged the priests, saying, *"You must send them vocations; send young women to this Congregation."* However, I did not stay there for long... Just six months...



## *Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers*

The General Chapter was held at Chevilly-Larue on August 22 and the days which followed.

**The first round of ballots...** Two-thirds of the votes were necessary. A bishop could not be elected superior general with only a simple majority. Fifty-one percent of the votes would not be enough; I had to have two-thirds, sixty-seven percent. At the first ballot, I was only two percent away from being elected. So I stood up and said: *"Listen, for goodness' sake, let me stay in the diocese of Tulle. I arrived there six months ago; I am beginning to know the priests, the people, the works of the diocese... For two years they were without a bishop. Will they again be left without a bishop?... Since Pope John XXIII appointed me to the diocese of Tulle, leave me there..."*

**The second round of ballots...** Seventy percent, seventy-two... Oh! What could I do?

See how God was leading me every time! Always against my wishes! Well, I tried to accept it wholeheartedly and with courage, and I think that this is one of the lessons which I would like you to learn from these examples: **when we do the Will of God and not our own, the Good Lord blesses us. And in the end we become attached to the task which God has given us. Do not be afraid.**

The Pope's approbation still had to be obtained. Since I was the bishop of Tulle, the Congregation obviously could not remove me from my diocese just like that, without the Pope's authorization. The general secretary had to be telegraphed so that he would know to send this telegram: *"Confirmation requested for the election of Archbishop Lefebvre as superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers."* And Pope John XXIII answered, *"I bless the election of Archbishop Lefebvre, superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers."*

Fine! Finished with Tulle. Superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers! This happened in August 1962, you know, just at the beginning of the Council: the Council began in October 1962. So! Right in the heat of the battle! The **third world war**, as I say. I went through the 1914–1918 war, the 1939–1945 war, and the 1962–1965 war of the Council... And in my opinion, the last one was the worst! It was the worst because it was the one which killed souls. It did not kill bodies; it killed souls.

So, there I was, superior general of the Holy Ghost Fathers. I had done all my studies in Rome with the Holy Ghost Fathers. However, the French Seminary was not a seminary which formed the future members of the Congregation; once their studies had been

completed, these seminarians returned to their dioceses. I knew the Congregation rather well but, having done only the one year of novitiate and then immediately leaving for the missions, I did not know many of the Holy Ghost Fathers.

Anyway, that did not matter; I had very good assistants. I had six assistants, because there were five thousand two hundred members in the Congregation and sixty bishops. The Congregation had sixty bishops who had dioceses in Africa, South America, the United States, and Canada. We had bishops pretty much everywhere, although not throughout the whole world because the Congregation of the Holy Ghost Fathers aimed at the evangelization of the blacks. There had to be a group of blacks to justify our presence. That is how, for example, the Congregation was able to have fifty-two parishes in the United States, particularly in Louisiana where there were many blacks. We even had one in that famous section of New York, Harlem, where the police do not dare to go!... Taxis will not go there either! If you ask to go to that part of town, the taxi stops before getting there and the driver says to you, *"Now you will have to go on foot because we do not go into this section."* It is dreadful. However, we did have a parish in that part of town. I think a few priests (two, I believe) still go there to visit the hospital, which is about three-tenths of a mile away, when accidents occur... and



*The Archbishop is elected superior general of the  
Holy Ghost Fathers on August 22, 1962.*

accidents occur all the time. The blacks there are Puerto Ricans, people who come from all over. Some kill or wound each other, stab each other during fights in the cafes and so on... Then they are brought to the hospital; and if they say they are Catholics, a Father is called since they are in danger of death and should be given Extreme Unction. For this distance of only three-tenths of a mile, the Fathers used to go on foot. Since they were priests and wore the cassock, they were still respected; they were not robbed or attacked. Now they are obliged to ask for a police escort to ensure their safety. Incredible, incredible! So that is how it was! But you see that the Congregation of the Holy Ghost was very, very extensive and immense.

Caring principally for the blacks, it spread to quite a few countries, to the United States (of which I already spoke to you), then to Canada. But the French-speaking, English-speaking, and Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa were obviously the most extensive sphere of activity for its missionaries. It also worked in the West Indies: Martinique, Guadeloupe, Trinidad; in South America: French Guiana, Brazil—Amazonas, as well as the states of Santa Catarina and Rio in southern Brazil; and elsewhere... In short, wherever there were blacks.

The countries of Europe obviously—and also Canada and the United States—were the places in which we could recruit vocations and likewise have houses; but



particularly France, seeing that the Congregation was founded by Father Libermann who was an Alsatian Jew (it is rather peculiar, but that is how it is). We also had a province in Belgium, a province in England, Ireland, Germany, and Switzerland. There was not a province in Italy; there were a few Italians, but not many. The Italians like to join Italian congregations. They are very family oriented. When an Italian moves, whether it be to the United States, China, or elsewhere, he brings all his nephews, nieces, cousins, the whole family. He does not work with people of the country, but has his whole family come in order to work. Italians are very attached to their country. It is very difficult for a congregation which has not been founded in Italy to become established there. We were not able to get Swiss Germans either. From French-speaking Switzerland, yes, but not from German-speaking Switzerland where it was impossible to get established. Would it be the same for the Society of Saint Pius X? Although I did nothing special, Swiss Germans came, both men and women, and Italians also. We do have some Italians... Three more entered at Flavigny this year, which is wonderful. Thanks be to God!

The Congregation of the Holy Ghost was thus very important, especially with all its bishops, but I was elected at the very moment that the Council was beginning, and this was obviously an event which would have a tremendous impact on life in the Congregation. At the same time I had, right from the beginning, the

responsibility given to me by the General Chapter of relocating the motherhouse. It was, at that time, on Rue Lhomond in Paris, together with the provincial house. This was often the cause of little difficulties, so the General Chapter insisted that the superior general transfer the motherhouse to Rome, as many other religious congregations had done. We therefore left the provincial house during my first two years as superior general and moved to another house in Paris, on Rue des Pyrénées; from there, two years later, we went to Monte Mario in Rome where the motherhouse is still located. All this gave me quite a few concerns, in addition to the Council, in addition to the visits. Of course I had to visit all those countries, all those regions, all those lands. It was really quite a considerable task. And those who had been against me, against my election, took advantage of this during the Council. Indeed, there was a small group who did not agree with my line of thinking, who were afraid of my "traditionalism," and yet, in spite of all that, I was elected by a large majority. The members of this little group—very active—were mostly seminary professors like Father Lécuyer who was in Rome. They formed a small intellectual group, progressive, modernist, and determined, I would say. So, since the Council was, in fact, favoring them, it must be said that they felt encouraged and took advantage of this to spread their propaganda within the Congregation for the adaptation—the *aggiornamento*—of the Congregation, and all its consequences...

## *Extraordinary General Chapter Resignation as Superior General*

After the Council, the Pope asked all religious congregations to hold an extraordinary General Chapter in order to adapt their constitutions to the spirit of the Council. This was very vague, difficult, and dangerous, very dangerous. In 1968 all the congregations, including my own, had to have this Chapter. Having been elected for twelve years, that is from 1962 to 1974, nothing could require me to hand in my resignation in 1968: I should have remained superior general for six more years. I was, however, confronted with a veritable little revolution inside the Congregation. Some of the members of the General Chapter, especially the Dutch, manifested their desire that our constitutions no longer be enforced, and this before they were changed and the changes were approved by the Congregation for Religious. Even with a General Chapter, congregations were to submit their modified constitutions to the Congregation for Religious which would either approve or not approve them. But that is not how these men wanted it! Even without any authorization from the Congregation for Religious, they wanted the Chapter to be presided over by a triumvirate. I, who was the superior general, did not even preside over the General Chapter, although it was clearly written in the constitutions that the superior general would be the one to direct all the business of the General Chapter.

When I saw this willfulness, I decided to have a vote taken, and if the vote was in favor of this triumvirate, of this radical change in the General Chapter, well, we would see... The results: a majority was in favor of this triumvirate, which was basically asking for the elimination of the superior general! The triumvirate—three Fathers elected by the Chapter—would preside over the Chapter and take charge of reforming the Congregation in conformity with the spirit of the Council. I saw clearly that everything would be turned upside down—completely changed—and that the Congregation would adopt a new spirit, a spirit which I could not let in, and against which I had fought during the Council. To think that, since I was still the superior general, I would have to sign all these proceedings which, in reality, would sanction the Congregation's destruction, and that in the Congregation's history it would be said that Archbishop Lefebvre was the one who, practically speaking, by his signature, was responsible for it: that I could not accept.

After the vote, therefore, since they wanted to take my place anyway, I took my car, left, and returned to the motherhouse. I went beforehand to the Congregation for Religious to see the cardinal prefect and ask him if he was in agreement with what they were doing, if it was something admissible. Cardinal Antoniutti was absent, visiting South America at the time, and it

was the Congregation's secretary, the first in charge after the cardinal, who received me. So I explained the situation to him.

*"Are you, or are you not, in agreement with this?"*

*"Oh, you know, since the Council, you have to understand how it is. In fact, you see, the superior of the Redemptorist Congregation just came for the same reason... They wanted to change... well, at least those who were directing the General Chapter did... So I advised this superior general to take a trip to America and then..."*

He advised me, the superior general, to take a trip to America too, to abandon my Congregation, to abandon the General Chapter to itself! Insane! I said to myself: *"Can you believe this? I am not even going to discuss this with the secretary. If that is how things are, it would be a waste of time!"*

At the motherhouse, I wrote a very nice letter to the Pope saying that I was handing in my resignation in view of what was being asked of me in the situation presently developing in the Congregation, that I did not feel capable of taking on the responsibility for a transformation of this kind.



My resignation was accepted. I was no longer the superior general and could no longer stay in the Congregation, in that revolutionary milieu. There was no way! Looking for a place in Rome where I could live, I took refuge with the Lithuanian priests, on the Lithuanian Way. These Lithuanian priests had a seminary, and across from the seminary on the other side of the street, they had a type of hostelry where their priests coming from Lithuania made short stays and which was the residence of a few Fathers who were working in Rome. So I asked if they would take me in, and they graciously did.

Taking my few personal belongings, I therefore moved into this hostelry of Lithuanian priests, taken care of by the German Sisters of Saint Catherine. These Sisters, who were rather numerous, had large hospitals in Fribourg and elsewhere. They had agreed to take care of the domestic tasks for the Lithuanian seminary and for this hostelry for priests. I came to know these Sisters who were very kind and very devoted. There were a certain number of Brazilians among them who came from the state of Santa Catarina.

I made my home there, and during that time I was no longer occupied with the Congregation, since I no longer held an office. I kept in contact with a few of the Fathers, whom I knew well; they had taken part in

the General Chapter and were part of the General Council. But obviously everything had been changed after my departure.

The Congregation of the Propaganda asked me to come and do some work for them, taking charge of an African catechism project. I went, but not for long, because soon after... Well, you know what happened. I do not know if it is worth continuing these conferences because we are coming to the end...

## Chapter 5

### *Never Precede Providence*

**W**e are coming to the end... To the end and to the beginning... To the beginning of the foundation of the Society, and to the end of my journey once the Congregation was founded.

It was at this time that some clerics who are now Father Aulagnier and Father Cottard (then seminarians at the French Seminary in Rome), and five or six others came to me and described the situation at the French Seminary, where things were going from bad to worse: no more discipline, seminarians going out at night, no cassocks, weekly liturgical changes (a liturgical group was in charge of making up a new liturgy each week). There was truly incredible disorder in the French Seminary which I had known to be so flourishing and which I remembered so fondly.



These young seminarians, knowing I was free from any commitments at that time, insisted that I do something for them. Personally, I was not anxious to get back to work again. It was 1969—I was almost sixty-five years old—and I did not think it was the time for me to be starting something else. Many people retire at age sixty-five, so I figured I was entitled to do the same. But because of their insistence, I was willing to take care of them, without however having the least thought of founding a society. Far from it!

## *Fribourg*

As superior general, I had had some contacts in Switzerland, and particularly in the Congregation's Swiss province where there was a house which accommodated students and sent them to follow courses at the University of Fribourg. I knew Bishop Charrière well; he had come to Dakar when I was archbishop there, and I knew him personally. I would be able to make some kind of arrangement with him to put these few seminarians in the Holy Ghost Fathers' seminary in Fribourg so that they could continue their studies at the University. I thought this would be the simplest solution.

I sent some of them to Fribourg right away in order to get them out of their present surroundings. I went there once or twice to see them, to see how things

were going. But an *aggiornamento* was taking place there too: changes were being made. These seminarians were no longer happy in the community of the Holy Ghost Fathers because the liturgy was being changed, civil clothing was being adopted, and there was no longer any discipline. "Oh," they said, "*we are not going to remain for long. We are not receiving any formation. They are not giving us anything—no spiritual conferences, nothing at all. With things the way they are, we cannot stay.*"

"Oh, this is worrisome," I thought.

So I went to see Bishop Charrière. I asked him if there wasn't something else at Fribourg which would be better than this house of the Holy Ghost Fathers, somewhere that the seminarians I was looking after could stay and receive a better formation. He answered me: "*You know, Your Excellency, the situation right now is very bad and is getting worse and worse. I am very pessimistic about the future of the diocese itself and the priestly formation. I am pessimistic; I do not know how things are going to turn out. In any case, yes, we do have an interdiocesan seminary which serves all the Swiss dioceses and even accepts secular students. So it could very well receive your students also. I suggest you inquire there.*"

I went to see this interdiocesan seminary and the superior very kindly received me. "*Your Excellency,*" he said, "*we accept secular students, so we are certainly willing*

*to take in a few additional seminarians who would go to the University. That is not a problem. However, to be frank, the seminarians here do not receive any special formation. They board here, do what they want, and organize themselves as they wish; but as far as we are concerned, they are not our responsibility. If they desire, they may very easily have and follow their own rule of life; they may very easily do their spiritual exercises among themselves, together, in the chapel... no problem. But don't count on us for anything. We will lodge and feed them, but that is the extent of it."*

*"They are going to be in exactly the same situation as they were with the Holy Ghost Fathers," I thought. "The official liturgy is again going to be the new liturgy, and everything else will also be changed... So what good will it do them to go there? There is no discipline; they can go out anytime, even during the night. That is not acceptable! I cannot be responsible for the formation of seminarians under such conditions."*

What was to be done? There had to be some solution. Knowing that I was somewhat looking after a few seminarians, Father Philippe, a Dominican, Mr. Bernard Fäy, a layman (both professors at the University), Father d'Hauterive, and another layman (also a friend of mine, who was teaching at Fribourg), asked to see me. They wanted to talk to me a little about this question of the formation of seminarians. They were interested in it, and wondered if there wasn't something that could be done...

They had me come to Mr. Bernard Fäy's home and were quite insistent. *"Your Excellency,"* they said, *"you have to do something; you cannot just leave these seminarians as they are, like this. We will be sure to send you others; it will not be difficult. We already know of several who desire to receive a real formation."*

*"Here I am, sixty-five years old,"* I answered, *"and I have to start all over again!... Listen, I will be happy to try to help these seminarians. I am willing to find money for them to pay their room and board, and I will be happy to direct them a little in their studies; I am very willing to help them. That they find a priest, a chaplain who will take an interest in them—something like that is just fine! But as for me personally, I am in Rome now and I have no intention of leaving. I am not interested in beginning a new undertaking."*

Faced with this project which did not appeal to me at all—here again, it was Providence which was compelling me to forge ahead!—I said: *"Fine! Listen, it is simple. Since you insist, it will be Bishop Charrière who decides. I know Bishop Charrière, the bishop of Fribourg. I will go and see him. If he encourages me to go ahead, fine, I will see if I can organize something for these seminarians."* There was still no question though, of founding a society, just of taking care of these seminarians in a more direct way. *"If Bishop Charrière does not agree, then I will not do anything or will do only what he tells me."*

I went to see Bishop Charrière and laid the matter before him. *"Yes, yes, by all means,"* he said. *"The situation is very serious, you know, and you will see that things are going to get even worse. Do it; I beg you to do it. Look for something here in the city; rent a building; put your seminarians there and take care of them; otherwise they will not receive a formation. You must do something for them. You must not abandon them."*

Well there you are! *"Since you are the voice of Providence,"* I answered, *"we will see what we can do. I will think about it and then see if accommodations can be found."*

We thus began looking, with our Fribourg friends, to see if we could find some place to rent in the city so that the seminarians would be in surroundings more conducive to the formation which we desired to give them; a true formation for seminarians, with a chapel, the Mass, spiritual conferences, a rule, discipline, etc.—the ambiance of a seminary.

## *Marly Street*

We found something with the Fathers of Don Bosco on Marly Street. The Fathers agreed to rent practically a whole floor of their house to us which enabled us to have a chapel and enough bedrooms to lodge about ten people. They also agreed to give us a

separate refectory. They lodged students, hoping that some of them would have a Salesian vocation, but in reality, vocations were rare. It was, if you like, a type of boarding house for young people who went to the city for their studies. The house was not full, though, so the Salesian Father, who took care of it by himself, was very happy to rent out part of the building because it brought in money to balance the budget. He kindly accommodated us, and we were always on good terms with him during the year we spent there.

We began, waiting to see who would come... Mr. Aulagnier, Mr. Tissier de Mallerais, Mr. Pellabeuf, and six others who were sent by Father Philippe and other friends in Fribourg, so at the beginning, there were nine of them. I tried to find a priest to help me since I was still busy in Rome with the Congregation of the Propaganda. I was not planning, moreover, to dedicate myself completely to this work. The seminarians would do their philosophical and theological studies at the University of Fribourg; there would not be, strictly speaking, seminary courses given in the Salesian house. It would simply give a spiritual setting to help them do their studies and be formed spiritually, sacerdotally. So I found Father Clerc, who came to help me for awhile. October 1969 was thus the beginning of this little boarding house...

Once again, Providence was leading me along ways upon which I was not really eager to walk. But walk I did!

### *A Peculiar Sickness*

Then I suddenly became sick, and I mean really sick. It started on December 8. I was in Rome and I had the flu, a bad flu, the Hong Kong flu. I do not know what sickness I caught, but I felt awful: I had liver troubles; I was aching all over; I had a hard time sleeping. I had no choice but to seek medical help. I went to the Holy Ghost Fathers for a few weeks' rest, counting on Father Clerc to take care of the seminarians. But my health worsened.

I was admitted to the Fribourg hospital. I truly thought that I was going to die! I could not eat anymore; my tongue was completely parched—it might as well have been made of wood. I could not swallow anything. The doctors... Tests... You know how it is: test after test. They tested everything. *"There is nothing wrong with you. You are fine. There is nothing wrong with you."* Nothing wrong with me, but I could no longer eat, I was losing weight, I was dying! Finally the idea occurred to them to take a scan of my stomach and liver. I do not know who fortunately came up with the idea. It was Providence, I suppose. In any case, they discovered that

I had parasites—strongyles—which were in the process of eating up my liver. They had the samples analyzed at the Tropical Institute of Bale and that is what the answer was: strongyles. I was to take such and such a medicine in order to get rid of them, and after a time of convalescence, I would be fine. Where had I gotten strongyles? I had no idea! People said, "*Bah! It was certainly in Africa.*" But it had been a long time since I had left Africa, so that could not be it. "*Then you were poisoned!*" Who knows! I have no idea! The most amusing comment, though, came from my little sister Marie-Thérèse in Columbia. She is a teaser. She looked in the Larousse medical dictionary for the definition of the term "*strongyles.*" It said, "*Strongyles is a parasite which is generally found in pigs and only discovered from an autopsy*"! Oh my! She was as pleased as could be to have found this in the Larousse medical dictionary. Fortunately for me, the parasite was discovered before the autopsy and not from it... So I was treated, and fortunately I was cured.

I was thus able to take up my work again with the seminarians. Because of the state that I had been in, though, I really thought that God did not want me to undertake this work...

And there were still more trials! Three seminarians left, then a fourth. When the end of May arrived, there remained only Mr. Aulagnier, Mr. Tissier



de Mallerais, and Mr. Pellabeuf. *"My dear friends,"* I said to them, *"I think next year you will be going to the interdiocesan seminary which we recently visited. You will have to organize something on your own so that you have some spiritual exercises and so on. As for me, I am not going to continue like this; it is not worth the trouble. We are going to stop the experiment."*

Mr. Aulagnier and especially Mr. Tissier de Mallerais protested. *"No! Oh no!"* they said. *"We must not stop! We do not want to go to a house where we will be given nothing. We do not want to receive that kind of formation! No! We will continue and maybe others will join us."*

Then, during the month of June, I received eleven requests. Eleven requests! Unbelievable! So I had to go on—I had no choice in the matter.

And then our friends, Mr. Aulagnier and Mr. Tissier de Mallerais, said to me: *"Your Excellency, what will become of us after the seminary? Where are we going to go?"*

*"Well, you will return to your dioceses, and you will work in your dioceses."*

*"But the bishops will never agree to receive us if we hold fast to Tradition, if we continue to wear the cassock, if we want to hold on to all that. They will never accept us! No matter where we go, we will be sent away. We will never be able to work in the dioceses."*

*"But what can be done about it?"*

*"We must stay together. A society must be founded to unite us together. Then we must try to find a bishop who will accept us and allow us to work together to continue Tradition. Otherwise it will never work."*

*"You know," I said, "you might be right... We will try to found a society. Nevertheless it will need to be approved. So before anything else, let's work on the statutes."*

I drew up the statutes of the Society, and when bringing them to Bishop Charrière, I said to myself: *"If Bishop Charrière accepts them, good, but it will surprise me. He knows we are traditionalists. He will soon have served his time; he is planning to hand in his resignation in January. He will not want to get involved in something like this. But, we will see."*

*"Fine, I will study this," Bishop Charrière said to me. "Come back after vacation and we will see."*

Meanwhile, what was to be done with the eleven young men who were expected, and the three seminarians who were still there? The Salesians did not want us anymore. They had understood that we were traditionalists since we refused to adopt the New Mass. The Father had said to his provincial: *"They are traditionalists, you know. They refuse the New Mass; they*

*always say the Old Mass. We cannot allow them to stay here with us; it is just not possible."* They let us know that at the end of the year, the house would no longer be available to us. So again we had to look for another.

## *Vignettaz*

Then God gave us, at Fribourg, the magnificent little house of "*Vignettaz*." We moved our belongings there at the end of June, and our seminarians were thus able to continue what they had begun at the Salesian's. However, for the eleven new ones, we had to make arrangements for a year of preparation or spirituality, a type of novitiate which they would make before their entrance into the seminary. Where were they going to stay? We looked everywhere in the Fribourg area. It was difficult to find anything.

Then, lo and behold, I was contacted from France: "*Why don't you go to see the lawyer, Mr. Lovey? He has a building in Valais which he might be able to put at your disposition, a building which formerly belonged to the Canons of the Great Saint Bernard.*"

Mr. Lovey lived in Fully... I did not know him. Fully, however, sounded familiar: I knew Father Bonvin, the parish priest there, very well. We had been together at the French Seminary and our paths had crossed several times since.



*The Archbishop with his seminarians at Ecône (1971).*

So I went to Fully to see Father Bonvin.

"Do you know Mr. Lovey?" I asked him.

"Of course I know him. Why?"

"Well, it seems that he has a building which he might be able to let us use for a type of novitiate, a year of spirituality. I would like to know if it is really feasible."

"That's simple enough. We will invite him for lunch. You can talk to him about it and find out."

Mr. Lovey arrived. "Yes, it is true!" he said to me. "We have a building which needs to be put to use. The Canons of the Great Saint Bernard wanted to sell their house at Ecône which at one time was both their agricultural house and a novitiate. They used to raise their dogs there. We did not want that building, which for six hundred years had been a house of the religious of the Great Saint Bernard, to become a house destined for just any use, maybe even something of ill repute. So when we heard they wanted to sell, five of us from Valais got together—Mr. Genoud, Mr. Rausis, Mr. Marcel Pedroni, his brother Alphonse Pedroni, and I—and we decided to form an association and buy the house... Let's go take a look at it and see if it suits your purpose. We already offered it to the Carmel of Montélimar which was thinking of settling there, but the building did not suit them. At the moment, it

*is being used for some handicapped people, but it does not look like they will be staying either. Anyway, we can find out... Talk to them about it. If it suits you, great. If not, you can look elsewhere."*

The idea was a good one. So we went to visit the home for handicapped persons. It was on this occasion that I met the parish priest of Riddes for the first time. He was very happy at the thought that perhaps there would be seminarians not far away from him and his village. We visited the house and sang a *Salve Regina* in the little chapel of Our Lady of the Fields. It was already almost in thanksgiving. Not everything had been worked out, but what did it matter!

Everything began to happen rather quickly... It was Providence leading us forward. We had to keep following, keep following, and also find priests to take care of the young men who would go there. The handicapped people, in fact, did not stay and Mr. Lovey said to me: *"There you are; it is at your disposition. You may move in whenever you like. And afterwards you will see!"*

That is what we did. During the month of October, we moved in. These were already two important steps. You see, we now had a house at Fribourg, and another at Ecône. There were only three seminarians at

the one place, which was not much to speak of; but afterwards another came to join them, Mr. Walz, which made four; then Mr. Cottard, which made five. Five at Vignettaz and eleven at Ecône. It was already a good beginning.

## *Approbation*

We had yet to find out, however, if Bishop Charrière approved of this Society. Yes or no? I went to see him with many doubts and greatly feared that he would not give his approval. It was November 1. *"Yes, yes, I approve of it,"* he said to me. *"I am in complete agreement with it. Yes, yes. I will have my secretary come."*

*"Get some paper, etc.,"* he said to his secretary. *"Type my canonical approbation of the statutes of the Society of Saint Pius X founded by Archbishop Lefebvre, etc."*

I said to myself: *"This is not possible!!! I am dreaming! It is just not possible!"* I can still see myself returning with the statutes... Bishop Charrière's signature and mine... in the midst of the seminarians at Vignettaz, and saying to them: *"Well, here they are! The statutes of the Society are approved!"* Oh! They did not believe me either. Ah, what a sign of Providence! Approved by the

local bishop! It was unbelievable! And all the more so because it was Bishop Mamie who became his successor three months later. Bishop Mamie was already against us and would not have wanted Bishop Charrière (whose vicar-general he was) to give his signature for this Society. He did not approve of it, but it was done.





*Mother Mary Gabriel comes to the rescue...*

## Chapter 6

# *And Then... the Birth of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius X*

So that is the story behind Ecône, which you know well. Afterwards came the **story of the Sisters**.

The first one to present herself to become a Society Sister thought that the Congregation was already in existence, when in fact, the Society of Sisters did not exist yet, except in my head. But she came saying, *"I want to become part of the Society."* She had completely made up her mind. She wanted to enter the Society, to become a Sister of the Society! What was to be done? I did not consider myself competent to found a congregation of Sisters, but I would have liked that there be one. So she came with another young lady, and afterwards, Sister Mary Gabriel<sup>1</sup> came to our assistance, etc., etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Mother Mary Gabriel was a Holy Ghost missionary as Archbishop Lefebvre was.



*First religious profession and taking of the habit  
in Albano on September 29, 1976.*

## Epilogue

Providence truly drew us along. But I was sluggish, I assure you; I followed with leaden footsteps. But I was pulled along, pulled along, pulled along, always a little more, a little more, until I was taken. And now you know the story of the Society.

So, you see, I cannot say that it was really I who said, *"I want to do this... it will be this way... and I think that... and I want that..."* It was not at all like that. I realize, and you have likewise noticed, that it has been the same throughout my entire life. It has always been Providence which decided everything. On my part, I rather resisted, I did not really agree, I was not very eager. But it pulled me on anyway, *"Ah, no, you must come!"* Then afterwards... well... I now see that God has, in fact, blessed, blessed everything, and that it has all worked out fine. *Deo gratias!* Let us hope that it will continue like that...

In January 1990 Archbishop Lefebvre came to the motherhouse of the Sisters of the Society Saint Pius in France, to work on the composition of his book *Spiritual Journey*. A few days after his arrival, his heart began to give him trouble and serious symptoms once again put the perspective of death before his eyes. Although suffering, the Archbishop was nevertheless not sad. That is why, before singing his *Nunc Dimittis*, he was prompted to sing his *Magnificat*—of all the great things which God had done in him. All the Sisters of the community thus came to be around their founder—a true father—as he recounted with joyful and moving simplicity:

*The Little Story of My Long Life.*

We hope this book will help many souls to act as the Archbishop did: living his Mass by seeing “*the workings of Providence in my daily life, and in turn experiencing how good it is to abandon oneself completely to that Providence in order to please God.*” This is the secret of true joy in the difficulties and sorrows of life.